

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
LABORATORY FOR NUCLEAR SCIENCE
CAMBRIDGE 39, MASSACHUSETTS

Rm. 26-569

February 1, 1960

Professor Joshua Lederberg
Dept. of Genetics
Stanford University
Palo Alto, California

Dear Joshua:

Thank you for your letter of January 19th and for the manuscript of your talk in Nice. I was very much interested in it and especially in your idea about the possible presence of large carbonaceous molecules in space. Certainly, we should be looking for such molecules. Of course, one of the difficulties is how to collect them from a fast-moving satellite without destroying them. Do you have any idea in this connection?

I, too, am very worried about project Mercury and for exactly the same reasons that you so clearly express in your letter. Let me state my present position in this matter. I believe that eventually man will want to go into space and that there will be sound scientific reasons for so doing. I feel, however, that no significant scientific mission can be accomplished until man can be landed on the moon or a planet and returned to the earth, or at least until he can circle the planet on a low orbit. This is, obviously, in the fairly distant future. It seems to me that the most important step in the preparation for such missions is the development of powerful and reliable vehicles. I am told that Mercury is also a necessary preliminary step toward manned space flights. I am not yet convinced that this is true and especially that the time is ripe for such a first step, and I have said so at the last meeting of the Space Panel of the President's Advisory Committee. However, I have the feeling that the decision about project Mercury has been made a very high level and cannot be changed.

With best wishes,

Sincerely yours,



Bruno Rossi

BR-n

P.S. Incidentally, I am not a member, but just a consultant of PSAC, and a member of its panel on space science headed by E. Purcell.